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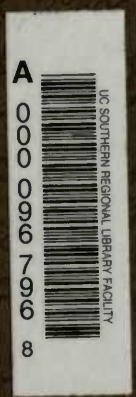

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MODERN INFIDELITY CONSIDERED

With respect to its

INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY:

IN

A SERMON,

PREACHED

AT

THE BAPTIST MEETING,

Cambridge.

By ROBERT HALL, A.M.

Professing themselves to be wise they became fools. ST. PAUL.

Sunt qui in fortunæ jam casibus omnia ponant,
Et nullo credant mundum rectore moveri,
Natura volvente vices et lucis, et anni;
Atque ideo intrepidi quæcunque altaria tangunt. JUV.

THE THIRD EDITION.

Cambridge,
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OXFORD-STREET, LONDON.

1800.

Bold diction, the majestic gait of his sent
vivid illustration, the volubility which would
the offender, the burst of honest indignation
triumphant vice, the biting sarcasm, the
appeal to the heart, the sagacious develop
of principle, the broad field of moral discu
on the characteristics of Mr Wells style

A head so metaphysical seems to have
in common with an imagination so glow
declamation so impassioned with such
practical; touches of pathos so tender,
such caustic irony, such bold invective,
spirit stirring encouragements to heroic
all conveyed in language worthy the
of such diverse thoughts, grave or humo
stern or playful — that most rare and
most eloquent of all kinds of speech, the
unless neither tongue of man or angel
eloquence has hitherto not fallen
constructed after no model of which we
more majestic than Addison, more easy and
straitened than Johnson, more sober than
such are the features of Wells deliberate
[illegible] and such is our most willing testimony

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PREFACE.

THE Author knows not whether it be necessary to apologize for the extraordinary length of this Sermon, which so much exceeds the usual limits of public discourses; for it is only for the Reader to conceive, (by a fiction of the imagination, if he pleases so to consider it,) that the patience of his Audience indulged him with their attention during its delivery. The fact is, not being in the habit of writing his sermons, this discourse was not committed to paper till after it was delivered; so that the phraseology may probably vary, and the bulk be somewhat extended; but the substance is certainly retained.

He must crave the indulgence of the Religious Public for having blended so little *theology* with it. He is fully aware, the chief attention of a Christian Minister should be occupied in explaining the doctrines, and enforcing the duties, of genuine Christianity; nor is he

 chargeable,

object of modern Sceptics; the firſt Sophists who have avowed an attempt to govern the world without inculcating the persuasion of a superior power.---It might well excite our surprise, to behold an effort to ſhake off the yoke of Religion, which was totally unknown during the prevalence of gross superstition, reserved for a period of the world distinguished from every other by the possession of a Revelation more pure, perfect, and better authenticated, than the enlightened sages of antiquity ever ventured to anticipate, were we not fully persuaded the immaculate holiness of this Revelation is precisely that which renders it disgusting to men who are determined at all events to retain their vices. Our Saviour furnishes the solution; *they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; neither will they come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved.*

While all the Religions, the Jewish excepted, which, previous to the promulgation of Christianity, prevailed in the world, partly the contrivance of human policy, partly the offspring of ignorant fear, mixed with the

mutilated

mutilated remains of traditionary revelation, were favourable to the indulgence of some vices, and but feebly restrained the practice of others; betwixt vice of every sort and in every degree, and the Religion of Jesus, there subsists an irreconcileable enmity, an eternal discord. The dominion of Christianity being, in the very essence of it, the dominion of virtue, we need look no farther for the sources of hostility in any who oppose it, than their attachment to vice and disorder.

This view of the controversy, if it be just, demonstrates its supreme importance, and furnishes the strongest plea with every one with whom it is not a matter of indifference whether vice or virtue, delusion or truth, govern the world, to exert his talents in whatever proportion they are possessed, in *contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*. In such a crisis, is it not best for Christians of all denominations, that they may better concentrate their forces against the common adversary, to suspend, for the present, their internal disputes, imitating the policy of wise states, who have never failed

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to consider the invasion of an enemy as the signal for terminating the contests of party? Internal peace is the best fruit we can reap from external danger. The momentous contest at issue betwixt the Christian Church and Infidels, may instruct us how trivial, for the most part, are the controversies of its members with each other, and that the different ceremonies, opinions and practices, by which they are distinguished, correspond to the variety of feature and complexion, discernible in the offspring of the same Parent, among whom there subsists the greatest family likeness. May it please God so to dispose the minds of Christians of every visible church and community, *that Ephraim no longer vexing Judah, nor Judah Ephraim*, the only rivalry felt in future may be, who shall most advance the interests of our common Christianity, and the only provocation sustained, *that of provoking each other to love and good works!*---When, at the distance of more than half a century, Christianity was assaulted, by a *Woolston*, a *Tindal*, and a *Morgan*, it was ably supported, both by Clergymen of the Established

Establisfhed Church, and writers among Protestant Dissenters; the labours of a *Clarke* and a *Butler*, were associated with thoſe of a *Doddridge*, a *Leland*, and a *Lardner*, with such equal reputation and success, as to make it evident that the intrinsic excellence of Religion needs not the aid of external appendages; but that, with or without a dowry, her charms are of sufficient power to fix and engage the heart.

The writer of this discourse will feel himself happy, should his example stimulate any of his brethren, of superior abilities, to contribute their exertions in so good a cause. His apology for not entering more at large, into the proofs of the being of a God*, and the evidences of Christianity †, is, that these sub-

* See an excellent Sermon on Atheism, by the Rev. Mr. *Eſtlin*, of *Bristol*, at whose Meeting the substance of this discourse was first preached. In the sermon referred to, the argument for the existence of a Deity, is stated with the utmost clearness and precision, and the sophistry of *Dupuis*, a French Infidel, refuted in a very satisfactory manner.

† It is almost superfluous to name a work so universally known as Dr. *Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity*, which is, probably, without exception, the most clear and satisfactory statement of the Historical proofs of the Christian Religion, ever exhibited in any age or country.

jects have been already handled with great ability by various writers, and that he wished rather to confine himself to one view of the subject, the total incompatibility of Sceptical principles with the existence of Society. Should his life be spared, he may probably, at some future time, enter into a fuller and more particular examination of the Infidel Philosophy, both with respect to its speculative principles, and its practical effects; its influence on society and on the individual. In the mean time, he humbly consecrates this discourse to the honour of that Saviour, who, when the means of a more liberal offering are wanting, commends the widow's mite.

Cambridge, January 18.

P. S. The Author has availed himself of the opportunity afforded by a new impression, to correct some errors which had crept unawares in tothe first edition, as well as to make a few other alterations too trivial to be specified.

A SER-

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SERMON,

ON

EPHESIANS, ii. 12.

Without God in the World.

AS the Chriſtian miniſtry is eſtabliſhed for the inſtruction of men, throughout every age, in truth and holineſs, it muſt adapt itſelf to the ever ſhifting ſcenes of the moral world, and ſtand ready to repel the attacks of impiety and error, under whatever form they may appear. The Church and the World form two ſocieties ſo diſtinct, and governed by ſuch oppoſite principles and maxims, that, as well from this contrariety as from the expreſs warnings of Scripture, true Chriſtians muſt look for a ſtate of warfare, with this conſoling aſſurance, that the Church, like the burning buſh beheld by Moſes in the land of Midian, may be encompaſſed with flames, but will never be conſumed.

When ſhe was delivered from the perſecuting power of Rome, ſhe only experienced a change of trials. The oppreſſion of external violence was followed by the more dangerous and inſidious attacks of internal enemies. The freedom of enquiry

quiry claimed and aſſerted at the reformation, degenerated, in the hands of men who profeſſed the principles without poſſeſſing the ſpirit of the reformers, into a fondneſs for ſpeculative refinements, and conſequently into a ſource of diſpute, faction and hereſy. While proteſtants attended more to the points on which they differed, than to thoſe in which they agreed, while more zeal was employed in ſettling ceremonies and defending ſubtleties, then in enforcing plain revealed truths, the lovely fruits of peace and charity periſhed under the ſtorms of controverſy.

In this disjointed and diſordered ſtate of the Chriſtian Church, they who never looked into the interior of Chriſtianity, were apt to ſuſpect, that to a ſubject ſo fruitful in particular diſputes, muſt attach a general uncertainty, and that a religion founded on revelation, could never have occaſioned ſuch diſcordancy of principle and practice amongſt its diſciples. Thus Infidelity is the joint offſpring of an irreligious temper and unholy ſpeculation, employed, not in examining the Evidences of Chriſtianity, but in detecting the vices and imperfections of profeſſing Chriſtians. It has paſſed through various ſtages, each diſtinguiſhed by higher gradations of impiety; for when men arrogantly abandon their guide, and wilfully ſhut their

eyes

eyes on the light of heaven, it is wisely ordained that their errors shall multiply at every step, until their extravagance confutes itself, and the mischief of their principles works its own antidote. That such has been the progress of Infidelity will be obvious from a slight survey of its history:

Lord *Herbert*, the first and purest of our English Free-thinkers, who flourished in the beginning of the reign of Charles the First, did not so much impugn the doctrine or the morality of the scriptures, as attempt to supersede their necessity, by endeavouring to shew, that the great principles of the unity of God, a moral government, and a future world, are taught with sufficient clearness by the light of nature. *Bolingbroke* and others of his successors advanced much farther, and attempted to invalidate the proofs of the moral character of the Deity, and consequently all expectations of rewards and punishments, leaving the Supreme Being no other perfections than those which belong to a first cause or almighty contriver. After him, at a considerable distance, followed *Hume*, the most subtle, if not the most philosophical of the Deists, who, by perplexing the relations of cause and effect, boldly aimed to introduce an universal Scepticism, and to pour a more than Egyptian darkness into the whole regi-

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on of morals. Since his time, Sceptical writers have ſprung up in abundance, and Infidelity has allured multitudes to its ſtandard; the young and ſuperficial by its dexterous ſophiſtry, the vain by the literary fame of its champions, and the profligate by the licentiouſneſs of its principles. Atheiſm, the moſt undiſguiſed, has at length begun to make its appearance.

Animated by numbers and emboldened by ſucceſs, the Infidels of the preſent day have given a new direction to their efforts, and impreſſed a new character on the ever growing maſs of their impious ſpeculations.

By uniting more cloſely with each other, by giving a ſprinkling of irreligion to all their literary productions, they aim to engroſs the formation of the public mind, and, amidſt the warmeſt profeſſions of attachment to virtue, to effect an entire diſruption of morality from religion. Pretending to be the teachers of virtue and the guides of life, they propoſe to revolutionize the morals of mankind, to regenerate the world by a proceſs entirely new, and to rear the temple of virtue, not merely without the aid of religion, but on the renunciation of its principles and the deriſion of its ſanctions. Their party has derived a great acceſſion of numbers and ſtrength, from events the moſt momentous

mentous and aſtoniſhing in the political world, which have divided the ſentiments of Europe betwixt hope and terror, and, however they may iſſue, have, for the preſent, ſwelled rhe tanks of Infidelity. So rapidly, indeed, has it advanced ſince this criſis, that a great majority on the continent, and in England a conſiderable proportion, of thoſe who purſue literature as a profeſſion *, may juſtly be conſidered as the open or diſguiſed abettors of Atheiſm.

With reſpect to the ſceptical and religious ſyſtems, the inquiry at preſent is not ſo much which is the trueſt in ſpeculation, as which is the moſt uſeful in practice; or in other words, whether morality will be beſt promoted, by conſidering it as part of a great and comprehenſive law, emanating from the will of a ſupreme, omnipotent legiſlator; or as a mere expedient adapted to our preſent ſituation, enforced by no other motives than thoſe which ariſe from the proſpects and intereſts of the preſent ſtate. The *abſurdity* of Atheiſm having been demonſtrated ſo often and ſo clearly by many eminent men, that this part of the ſubject is exhauſted, I ſhould haſten immediately to what I

* By thoſe who purſue literature as a profeſſion, the Author would be underſtood to mean that numerous claſs of literary men, who draw their principal ſubſiſtence from their writings.

have

have more particularly in view, were I not apprehenſive a diſcourſe of this kind may be expected to contain ſome ſtatement of the argument in proof of a Deity, which, therefore, I ſhall preſent in as few and plain words as poſſible.

When we examine a watch, or any other piece of machinery, we inſtantly perceive marks of deſign. The arrangement of its ſeveral parts and the adaptation of its movements to one reſult, ſhew it to be a contrivance; nor do we ever imagine the faculty of contriving to be in the watch itſelf, but in a ſeparate agent. If we turn from art to nature, we behold a vaſt magazine of contrivances, we ſee innumerable objects replete with the moſt exquiſite deſign. The human eye, for example, is formed, with admirable ſkill for the purpoſe of ſight; the ear for the function of hearing. As in the productions of art, we never think of aſcribing the power of contrivance to the machine itſelf, ſo we are certain the ſkill diſplayed in the human ſtructure, is not a property of man, ſince he is very imperfectly acquainted with his own formation. If there be an inſeparable relation betwixt the ideas of a contrivance and a contriver, and it be evident in regard to the human ſtructure the deſigning agent is not man himſelf, there muſt undeniably be ſome ſeparate inviſible Being who is his former.

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This great Being we mean to indicate by the appellation of Deity.—

This reaſoning admits but of one reply. Why, it will be ſaid, may we not ſuppoſe the world has always continued as it is; that is, that there has been a conſtant ſucceſſion of finite beings, appearing and diſappearing on the earth from all eternity? I anſwer, whatever is ſuppoſed to have occaſioned this conſtant ſucceſſion, excluſive of an intelligent cauſe, will never account for the undeniable marks of deſign, viſible in all finite Beings; nor is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing a contrivance without a contriver diminiſhed by this imaginary ſucceſſion, but rather increaſed by being repeated at every ſtep of the ſeries.

Beſides, an eternal ſucceſſion of finite beings involves in it a contradiction, and is, therefore, plainly impoſſible. As the ſuppoſition is made to get quit of the idea of any one having exiſted from eternity, each of the beings in the ſucceſſion muſt have begun in time; but the ſucceſſion itſelf is eternal. We have then, a ſucceſſion of beings infinitely earlier than any being in the ſucceſſion; or, in other words, a ſeries of beings running on *ad infinitum*, before it reached any particular being; which is abſurd.

From theſe conſiderations, it is manifeſt there muſt be ſome eternal Being, or nothing could ever have exiſted; and ſince the beings which we behold, bear in their whole ſtructure evident marks of wiſdom and deſign, it is equally certain that he who formed them is a wiſe and intelligent agent.

To prove the unity of this great Being, in oppoſition to a plurality of Gods, it is not neceſſary to have recourſe to metaphyſical abſtractions: it is ſufficient to obſerve that the notion of more than one author of nature is inconſiſtent with that harmony of deſign which pervades her works, that it ſolves no appearances, is ſupported by no evidence, and ſerves no purpoſe but to embarraſs and perplex our conceptions.

Such are the proofs of the exiſtence of that great and glorious Being whom we denominate God: and it is not preſumption to ſay, it is impoſſible to find another truth in the whole compaſs of morals, which according to the juſteſt laws of reaſoning, admits of ſuch ſtrict and rigorous demonſtration.

But I proceed to the more immediate object of this diſcourſe, which, as has been already intimated, is not ſo much to evince the falſhood of Scepticiſm as a theory, as to diſplay its miſchievous effects, contraſted with thoſe which reſult from the belief of a Deity and a future ſtate. The ſubject viewed

viewed in this light, may be conſidered under two aſpects; the influence of the oppoſite ſyſtems on the principles of morals, and on the formation of character; the firſt may be ſtiled their direct, the latter, their equally important, but indirect conſequence and tendency,

I. The ſceptical or irreligious ſyſtem ſubverts the whole foundation of morals. It may be affirmed as a maxim, that no perſon can be required to act contrary to his greateſt good, or his higheſt intereſt, comprehenſively viewed in relation to the whole duration of his being. It is often our duty to forego our own intereſt *partially*; to ſacrifice a ſmaller pleaſure for the ſake of a greater; to incur a preſent evil in purſuit of a diſtant good of more conſequence; in a word, to arbitrate, amongſt interfering claims of inclination, is the moral arithmetic of human life. But to riſque the happineſs of the whole duration of our being in any caſe whatever, admitting it to be poſſible, would be fooliſh, becauſe the ſacrifice muſt, by the nature of it, be ſo great as to preclude the poſſibility of compenſation.

As the preſent world upon ſceptical principles, is the only place of recompence, whenever the practice of virtue fails to promiſe the greateſt ſum of preſent good, caſes which often occur in reality,

and much oftener in appearance, every motive to virtuous conduct is ſuperſeded, a deviation from rectitude becomes the part of wiſdom; and ſhould the path of virtue, in addition to this, be obſtructed by diſgrace, torment or death, to perſevere would be madneſs and folly, and a violation of the firſt and moſt eſſential law of nature. Virtue on theſe principles, being in numberleſs inſtances, at war with ſelf-preſervation, never can or ought to become a fixed habit of the mind.

The ſyſtem of Infidelity is not only incapable of arming virtue for great and trying occaſions; but leaves it unſupported in the moſt ordinary occurrences. In vain will its advocates appeal to a moral ſenſe, to benevolence and ſympathy; in vain will they expatiate on the tranquillity and pleaſure attendant on a virtuous courſe; for it is undeniable that theſe impulſes may be overcome, and though you may remind the offender, that in diſregarding them he has violated his nature, and that a conduct conſiſtent with them is productive of much internal ſatisfaction; yet, if he reply that his taſte is of a different ſort, that there are other gratifications which he values more, and that every man muſt chooſe his own pleaſures, the argument is at an end.

Rewards and puniſhments awarded by omnipotent power, afford a palpable and preſſing motive, which

which can never be neglected without renouncing the character of a rational creature ; but taſtes and reliſhes are not to be preſcribed.

A motive in which the reaſon of man ſhall acquieſce, enforcing the practice of virtue, at all times and ſeaſons, enters into the very eſſence of moral obligation ; modern Infidelity ſupplies no ſuch motive ; it is, therefore, eſſentially and infallibly a ſyſtem of enervation, turpitude and vice.

This chaſm in the conſtruction of morals, can only be ſupplied by the firm belief af a rewarding and avengiog Deity, who binds duty and happineſs, though they may ſeem diſtant, in an indiſſoluble chain, without which, whatever uſurps the name of virtue, is not a principle, but a feeling, not a determinate rule, but a fluctuating expedient, varying with the taſtes of individuals, and changing with the ſcenes of life.

Nor is this the only way in which Infidelity ſubverts the foundation of morals. All reaſoning on morals, pre-ſuppoſes a diſtinction betwixt inclinations and duties, affections and rules : the former prompt, the latter preſcribe ; the former ſupply motives to action, the latter regulate and control it. Hence, it is evident, if virtue has any juſt claim to authority, it muſt be under the latter of theſe notions, that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion, *in fact*, that its dominion has

has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and ſupreme.

But without the intervention of a ſuperior will, it is impoſſible there ſhould be any moral laws, except in the lax, metaphorical ſenſe. in which we ſpeak of the laws of matter and motion : men being eſſentially equal, morality is, on theſe principles, only a ſtipulation or ſilent compact, into which every man is ſuppoſed to enter, as far as ſuits his convenience, and for the breach of which he is accountable to nothing but his own mind. His own mind is his law, his tribunal and his judge,

Two conſequences, the moſt diſaſtrous to ſociety, will inevitably follow the general prevalence of this ſyſtem : the frequent perpetration of great crimes, and the total abſence of great virtues.

1. In thoſe conjunctures which tempt avarice or inflame ambition, when a crime flatters with the proſpect of impunity, and the certainty of immenſe advantage, what is to reſtrain an Atheiſt from its commiſſion ? To ſay that remorſe will deter him, is abſurd ; for remorſe, as diſtinguiſhed from pity, is the ſole offspring of religious belief, the extinction of which is the great purpoſe of the Infidel philoſophy.

The dread of puniſhment or infamy from his fellow creatures, will be an equally ineffectual barrier,

rier, becauſe crimes are only committed under ſuch circumſtances as ſuggeſt the hope of concealment; not to ſay that crimes themſelves will ſoon loſe their infamy and their horror, under the influence of that ſyſtem which deſtroys the ſanctity of virtue, by converting it into a low calculation of worldly intereſt. Here the ſenſe of an ever preſent Ruler, and of an avenging Judge, is of the moſt awful and indiſpenſible neceſſity, as it is that alone which impreſſes on all crimes the character of folly, ſhews that duty and intereſt in every inſtance coincide, and that the moſt proſperons career of vice, the moſt brilliant ſucceſſes of criminality, are but an *accumnlation of wrath, againſt the day of wrath.*

As the frequent perpetration of great crimes is an inevitable conſequence of the diffuſion of ſceptical principles, ſo to underſtand this conſequence in its full extent, we muſt look beyond their immediate effects, and conſider the diſruption of ſocial ties, the deſtruction of confidence, the terror, ſuſpicion and hatred, which muſt prevail in that ſtate of ſociety in which barbarous deeds are familiar. The tranquillity which pervades a well ordered community, aud the mutual good offices which bind its members together, is founded on the implied confidence in the indiſpoſition to annoy, in the juſtice, humanity and moderation of thoſe among whom we dwell; ſo that the worſt conſequence

quence of crimes is, that they impair the ſtock of public charity and general tenderneſs, The dread and hatred of our ſpecies would infallibly be grafted on a conviction that we were expoſed, every moment to the ſurges of an unbridled ferocity, and that nothing but the power of the magiſtrate ſtood between us and the daggers of aſſaſſins. In ſuch a ſtate, laws deriving no ſupport from public manners, are unequal to the taſk of curbing the fury of the paſſions, which from being concentrated into ſelfiſhneſs, fear, and revenge, acquire new force; terror and ſuſpicion beget cruelty, and inflict injuries by way of prevention; pity is extinguiſhed in the ſtronger impulſe of ſelf-preſervation; the tender and generous affections are cruſhed, and nothing is ſeen but the retaliation of wrongs, the fierce and unmitigated ſtruggle for ſuperiority. This is but a faint ſketch of the incalculable calamities and horrors we muſt expect, ſhould we be ſo unfortunate as ever to witneſs the triumph of modern Infidelity

2. This ſyſtem is a ſoil as barren of great and ſublime virtues, as it is prolific in crimes. By great and ſublime virtues are meant, thoſe which are called into action on great and trying occaſions, which demand the ſacrifice of the deareſt intereſts and proſpects of human life, and ſometimes of life itſelf; the virtues, in a word, which by their rarity

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and ſplendour draw admiration, and have rendered illuſtrious the character of patriots, martyrs, and confeſſors. It requires but little reflection to perceive, that whatever veils a future world, and contracts the limits of exiſtence within the preſent life, muſt tend, in a proportionable degree, to diminiſh the grandeur and narrow the ſphere of human agency.

As well might you expect exalted ſentiments of juſtice from a profeſſed gameſter, as look for noble principles in the man whoſe hopes and fears are all ſuſpended on the preſent moment, and who ſtakes the whole happineſs of his being on the events of this vain and fleeting life. If he is ever impelled to the performance of great atchievements in a good cauſe, it muſt be ſolely by the hope of fame; a motive which, beſides that it makes virtue the ſervant of opinion, uſually grows weaker at the approach of death, and which, however it may ſurmount the love of exiſtence, in the heat of battle, or in the moment of public obſervation, can ſeldom be expected to operate with much force on the retired duties of a private ſtation.

In affirming that Infidelity is unfavourable to the higher claſs of virtues; we are ſupported as well by facts as by reaſoning. We ſhould be ſorry to load our adverſaries with unmerited reproach;

but to what hiſtory, to what record, will they appeal, for the traits of moral greatneſs, exhibited by their diſciples? Where ſhall we look for the trophies of infidel magnanimity, or atheiſtical virtue? Not that we mean to accuſe them of inactivity: they have recently filled the world with the fame of their exploits; exploits of a different kind indeed, but of imperiſhable memory and diſaſtrous luſtre.

Though it is confeſſed great and ſplendid actions are not the ordinary employment of life, but muſt, from their nature, be reſerved for high and eminent occaſions, yet, that ſyſtem is eſſentially defective which leaves no room for their cultivation. They are important, both from their immediate advantage and their remoter influence. They often ſave and always illuſtrate, the age and nation in which they appear. They raiſe the ſtandard of morals; they arreſt the progreſs of degeneracy; they diffuſe a luſtre over the path of life: monuments of the greatneſs of the human ſoul, they preſent to the world the auguſt image of virtue in her ſublimeſt form, from which ſtreams of light and glory iſſue to remote times and ages: while their commemoration, by the pen of hiſtorians and poets, awakens in diſtant boſoms the ſparks of kindred excellence.

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Combine the frequent and familiar perpetration of atrocious deeds, with the dearth of great and generous actions, and you have the exact picture of that condition of society, which completes the degradation of the species; the frightful contrast of dwarfish virtues and gigantic vices, where every thing good is mean and little, and every thing evil is rank and luxuriant; a dead and sickening uniformity prevails, broken only at intervals by volcanic eruptions of anarchy and crime.

II. Hitherto we have considered the influence of Scepticism on the principles of virtue; and have endeavoured to shew that it despoils it of its dignity, and lays its authority in the dust: its influence on the formation of character remains to be examined. The actions of men are oftener determined by their character than their interest: their conduct takes its colour more from their acquired taste, inclinations, and habits, than from a deliberate regard to their greatest good. It is only on great occasions the mind awakes, to take an extended survey of her whole course, and that she suffers the dictates of reason to impress a new bias upon her movements; the actions of each day, are for the most part, links which follow each other in the chain of custom. Hence the great effort of practical wisdom is to imbue the mind with right

taſtes, affections and habits ; the elements of character, and maſters of action.

The excluſion of a ſupreme Being and of a ſuperintending Providence, tends directly to the deſtruction of moral taſte. It robs the univerſe of all finiſhed and conſummate excellence, even in idea. The admiration of perfect wiſdom and goodneſs, for which we are formed, and which kindles ſuch unſpeakable rapture in the ſoul, finding in the regions of Scepticiſm nothing to which it correſponds, droops and languiſhes. In a world which preſents a fair ſpectacle of order and beauty, of a vaſt family nouriſhed and ſupported by an almighty Parent, in a world which leads the devout mind ſtep by ſtep, to the contemplation of the firſt fair and the firſt good, the Sceptic is encompaſſed with nothing but obſcurity, meanneſs and diſorder.

When we reflect on the manner in which the idea of Deity is formed, we muſt be convinced that ſuch an idea, intimately preſent to the mind, muſt have a moſt powerful effect in refining the moral taſte. Compoſed of the richeſt elements, it embraces, in the character of a benificent Parent, and almighty Ruler, whatever is venerable in wiſdom, whatever is awful in authority, whatever is touching in goodneſs.

Human excellence is blended with many im-

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perfections, and ſeen under many limitations ; it is beheld only in detached and ſeparate portions, nor ever appears in any one character whole and entire : ſo that, when, in imitation of the Stoics, we wiſh to form out of theſe fragments the notion of a perfectly wiſe and good man, we know it is a mere fiction of the mind, without any real being in whom it is embodied and realized. In the belief of a Deity theſe conceptions are reduced to reality : the ſcattered rays of an ideal excellence are concentrated, and become the real attributes of that Being with whom we ſtand in the neareſt relation, who ſits ſupreme at the head of the univerſe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his preſence.

The efficacy of theſe ſentiments in producing and augmenting a virtuous taſte, will indeed be proportioned to the vividneſs with which they are formed, and the frequency with which they recur ; yet ſome benefit will not fail to reſult from them, even in their loweſt degree.

The idea of the ſupreme Being, has this peculiar property, that as it admits of no ſubſtitute, ſo from the firſt moment it is impreſſed, it is capable of continual growth and enlargement. God himſelf is immutable ; but our conception of his character is continually receiving freſh acceſſions, is continually growing more extended and refulgent, by having

having transferred upon it new perceptions of beauty and goodneſs, by attracting to itſelf, as a centre, whatever bears the impreſs of dignity, order or happineſs. It borrows ſplendour from all that is fair, ſubordinates to itſelf all that is great, and ſits enthroned on the riches of the univerſe.

As the object of worſhip will always be the object of imitation, hence ariſes a fixed ſtandard of moral excellence, by the contemplation of which, the tendencies to corruption are counteracted, the contagion of bad example is checked, and human nature riſes above its natural level.

When the knowledge of God was loſt in the world, juſt ideas of virtue and moral obligation diſappeared along with it. How is it to be otherwiſe accounted for, that in the poliſhed nations, and in the enlightened times of Pagan antiquity, the moſt unnatural luſts and deteſtable impurities were not only tolerated in private life*, but enter-

* It is worthy of obſervation, that the elegant and philoſophic *Xenophon*, in delineating the model of a perfect Prince in the character of Cyrus, introduces a Mede who had formed an unnatural paſſion for his hero, and relates the incident in a lively, feſtive humour, without being in the leaſt conſcious of any indelicacy attached to it. What muſt be the ſtate of manners in a country where a circumſtance of this kind, feigned, no doubt, by way of ornament, finds a place in ſuch a work? *Cyri Inſtit. Lib.* 1.

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ed into religion, and formed a material part of public worſhip †; while among the Jews, a people ſo much inferior in every other branch of knowledge, the ſame vices were regarded with horror?

The reaſon is this; the true character of God was unknown to the former, which, by the light of divine revelation, was imparted to the latter. The former caſt their deities in the mould of their own imaginations, in conſequence of which they partook of the vices and defects of their worſhippers: to the latter, no ſcope was left for the wanderings of fancy, but a pure and perfect model was preſcribed.

Falſe and corrupt, however, as was the religion of the Pagans (if it deſerve the name), and defective, and often vicious, as was the character of their imaginary deities, it was ſtill better for the world, for the void of knowledge to be filled with theſe, then abandoned to a total Scepticiſm; for if both ſyſtems are equally falſe, they are not equally pernicious. When the fictions of heathen-

Deinde nobis qui *concedentibus philoſophis antiquis*, adoleſcentulis delectamur etiam vitia ſæpe jucunda ſunt. *Cicero De Nat. Dei. Lib.* 1.

† —— *Nam quo non proſtat fœmina templo,* Juv.

The impurities practiſed in the worſhip of Iſis, an Egyptian Deity, roſe to ſuch a height, in the reign of *Tiberius*, that that profligate Prince thought fit to prohibit her worſhip, and at the ſame time inflicted on her prieſts the puniſhment of crucifixion. *Joſeph. Antiquit. Judaic. L.* 18.

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iſm conſecrated the memory of its legiſlators and heroes, it inveſted them for the moſt part with thoſe qualities which were in the greateſt repute. They were ſuppoſed to poſſeſs in the higheſt degree the virtues in which it was moſt honourable to excel, and to be the witneſſes, approvers and patrons of thoſe perfections in others, by which their own character was chiefly diſtinguiſhed. Men ſaw, or rather fancied they ſaw, in theſe ſuppoſed deities, the qualities they moſt admired dilated to a larger ſize, moving in a higher ſphere, and aſſociated with the power, dignity and happineſs of ſuperior natures. With ſuch ideal models before them, and conceiving themſelves continually acting under the eye of ſuch ſpectators and judges, they felt a real elevation : their eloquence became more impaſſioned, their patriotiſm inflamed, and their courage exalted.

Revelation, by diſplaying the true character of God, affords a pure and perfect ſtandard of virtue ; heatheniſm, one in many reſpects defective and vicious ; the faſhionable ſcepticiſm of the preſent day, which excludes the belief of all ſuperior powers, affords no ſtandard at all. Human nature knows nothing better or higher than itſelf, All above and around it being ſhrouded in darkneſs, and the proſpect confined to the tame realities of life, virtue has no room upwards to expand, nor

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are any excurſions permitted into that unſeen world, the true element of the great and good, by which it is fortified with motives equally calculated to ſatisfy the reaſon, to delight the fancy, and to impreſs the heart.

II. Modern Infidelity not only tends to corrupt the moral taſte; it alſo promotes the growth of thoſe vices which are the moſt hoſtile to ſocial happineſs. Of all the vices incident to human nature, the moſt deſtructive to ſociety are vanity, ferocity, and unbridled ſenſuality; and theſe are preciſely the vices which Infidelity is calculated to cheriſh.

That the love, fear, and habitual contemplation of a being infinitely exalted, or in other words, Devotion, is adapted to promote a ſober and moderate eſtimate of our own excellencies, is inconteſtible; nor is it leſs evident, that the excluſion of ſuch ſentiments muſt be favourable to pride. The criminality of pride will, perhaps, be leſs readily admitted; for though there is no vice ſo oppoſite to the ſpirit of Chriſtianity, yet there is none which, even in the Chriſtian world, has, under various pretences, been treated with ſo much indulgence.

There is, it will be confeſſed, a delicate ſenſibility to character, a ſober deſire of reputation, a wiſh to poſſeſs the eſteem of the wiſe and good, felt by the pureſt minds, and which is at the fartheſt remove from arrogance or vanity. The humility of a noble

mind ſcarcely dares to approve of itſelf, until it has ſecured the approbation of others. Very different is that reſtleſs deſire of diſtinction, that paſſion for theatrical diſplay, which inflames the heart and occupies the whole attention of vain men. This, of all the paſſions, is the moſt unſocial, avarice itſelf not excepted. The reaſon is plain. Property is a kind of good, which may be more eaſily attained, and is capable of more minute ſubdiviſions, than fame. In the purſuit of wealth, men are led by an attention to their own intereſt to promote the welfare of each other; their advantages are reciprocal; the benefits which each is anxious to acquire for himſelf, he reaps in the greateſt abundance from the union and conjunction of ſociety. The purſuits of vanity are quite contrary. The portion of time and attention mankind are willing to ſpare from their avocations and pleaſures, to devote to the admiration of each other is ſo ſmall, that every ſucceſsful adventurer is felt to have impaired the common ſtock. The ſucceſs of one is the diſappointment of multitudes. For though there be many rich, many virtuous, many wiſe men, fame muſt neceſſarily be the portion of but few. Hence every vain man, every man in whom vanity is the ruling paſſion, regarding his rival as his enemy, is ſtrongly tempted to rejoice in his miſcarriage and repine at his ſucceſs.

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Beſides, as the paſſions are ſeldom ſeen in a ſimple, unmixed ſtate, ſo vanity, when it ſucceeds, degenerates into arrogance; when it is diſappointed (and it is often diſappointed), it is exaſperated into malignity and corrupted into envy. In this ſtage the vain man commences a determined miſanthropiſt. He deteſts that excellence which he cannot reach. He deteſts his ſpecies, and longs to be revenged for the unpardonable injuſtice he has ſuſtained in their inſenſibility to his merits. He lives upon the calamities of the world: the vices and miſeries of men are his element and his food. Virtue, talents, and genius are his natural enemies, which he perſecutes with inſtinctive eagerneſs, and unrelenting hoſtility. There are who doubt the exiſtence of ſuch a diſpoſition; but it certainly iſſues out of the dregs of diſappointed vanity: a diſeaſe which taints and vitiates the whole character wherever it prevails. It forms the heart to ſuch a profound indifference to the welfare of others, that whatever appearances he may aſſume, or however wide the circle of his ſeeming virtues may extend, you will infallibly find the vain man is his own centre. Attentive only to himſelf, abſorbed in the contemplation of his own perfections, inſtead of feeling tenderneſs for his fellow creatures as members of the ſame family, as beings with whom he is appointed to

act, to ſuffer, and to ſympathize; he conſiders life as a ſtage on which he is performing a part, and mankind in no other light than ſpectators. Whether he ſmiles or frowns, whether his path is adorned with the rays of beneficence or his ſteps are died in blood, an attention to ſelf is the ſpring of every movement, and the motive to which every action is referred.

His apparent good qualities loſe all their worth, by loſing all that is ſimple, genuine and natural; they are even preſſed into the ſervice of vanity, and become the means of enlarging its power. The truly good man is jealous over himſelf, leſt the notoriety of his beſt actions by blending itſelf with their motive, ſhould diminiſh their value; the vain man performs the ſame actions for the ſake of that notoriety. The good man quietly diſcharges his duty and ſhuns oſtentation; the vain man conſiders every good deed loſt that is not publickly diſplayed. The one is intent upon realities, the other upon ſemblances: the one aims to *be* virtuous, the other to *appear* ſo.

Nor is a mind inflated with vanity more diſqualified for right action than juſt ſpeculation; or better diſpoſed to the purſuit of truth than the practice of virtue. To ſuch a mind the ſimplicity of truth is diſguſting. Careleſs of the improvement of mankind, and intent only upon aſtoniſhing with

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the appearance of novelty, the glare of paradox will be preferred to the light of truth; opinions will be embraced, not becauſe they are juſt, but becauſe they are new: the more flagitous, the more ſubverſive of morals, the more alarming to the wiſe and good, the more welcome to men who eſtimate their literary powers by the miſchief they produce, and who conſider the anxiety and terror they impreſs as the meaſure of their renown. Truth is ſimple and uniform, while error may be infinitely varied; and as it is one thing to ſtart paradoxes, and another to make diſcoveries, we need the leſs wonder at the prodigious increaſe of modern philoſophers.

We have been ſo much accuſtomed to conſider extravagant ſelf-eſtimation merely as a *ridiculous* quality, that many will be ſurpriſed to find it treated as a vice, pregnant with ſerious miſchief to ſociety. But, to form a judgement of its influence on the manners and happineſs of a nation, it is neceſſary only to look at its effects in a family; for bodies of men are only collections of individuals, and the greateſt nation is nothing more than an aggregate of a number of families. Conceive of a domeſtic circle, in which each member is elated with a moſt extravagant opinion of himſelf, and a proportionable contempt of every other, is full of little contrivances to catch applauſe, and whenever he is

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not praiſed is ſullen and diſappointed,—what a picture of diſunion, diſguſt, and animoſity would ſuch a family preſent; how utterly would domeſtic affection be extinguiſhed, and all the purpoſes of domeſtic ſociety be defeated! The general prevalence of ſuch diſpoſitions muſt be accompanied by an equal proportion of general miſery. The tendency of pride to produce ſtrife and hatred, is ſufficiently apparent from the pains men have been at to conſtruct a ſyſtem of politeneſs, which is nothing more than a ſort of mimic humility, in which the ſentiments of an offenſive ſelf-eſtimation are ſo far diſguiſed and ſuppreſſed, as to make them compatible with the ſpirit of ſociety; ſuch a mode of behaviour as would naturally reſult from an attention to the apoſtolic injunction: *Let nothing be done through ſtrife or vain glory: but in lowlineſs of mind, let each eſteem other better than themſelves.* But if the ſemblance is of ſuch importance, how much more uſeful the reality: if the mere garb of humility is of ſuch indiſpenſible neceſſity, that without it ſociety could not ſubſiſt, how much better ſtill would the harmony of the world be preſerved, were the condeſcenſion, deference, and reſpect, ſo ſtudiouſly diſplayed, a true picture of the heart?

The ſame reſtleſs and eager vanity which diſturbs a family, when it is permitted in a great national criſis to mingle with political affairs, diſtracts a kingdom

kingdom; infuſing into thoſe entruſted with the enaction of laws, a ſpirit of raſh innovation and daring empiriciſm, a diſdain of the eſtabliſhed uſages of mankind, a fooliſh deſire to dazzle the world with new and untried ſyſtems of policy, in which the precedents of antiquity aud the experience of ages are only conſulted to be trodden underfoot; and into the executive department of government, a fierce contention for pre-eminence, an inceſſant ſtruggle to ſupplant and deſtroy, with a propenſity to calumny and ſuſpicion, proſcription and maſſacre.

We ſhall ſuffer the moſt eventful ſeaſon ever witneſſed in the affairs of men to paſs over our heads to very little purpoſe, if we fail to learn from it ſome awful leſſons on the nature and progreſs of the paſſions. The true light in which the French Revolution ought to be contemplated, is that of a grand experiment on human nature. Among the various paſſions which that Revolution has ſo ſtrikingly diſplayed, none is more conſpicuons than vanity; nor is it difficult, without adverting to the national character of the people, to account for its extraordinary predominance. Political power, the moſt ſeducing object of ambition, never before circulated through ſo many hands; the proſpect of poſſeſſing it was never before preſented to ſo many minds. Multitudes, who by

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their birth and education, and not unfrequently by their talents, ſeemed deſtined to perpetual obſcurity, were, by the alternate riſe and fall of parties, elevated into diſtinction, and ſhared in the functions of government. The ſhort-lived forms of power and office glided with ſuch rapidity through ſucceſſive ranks of degradation, from the court to the very dregs of the populace, that they ſeemed rather to ſolicit acceptance, than to be a prize contended for* : yet, as it was ſtill impoſſible for all to poſſeſs authority, though none were willing to obey, a general impatience to break the ranks and ruſh into the foremoſt ground, maddened and infuriated the nation, and overwhelmed law, order, and civilization, with the violence of a torrent.

If ſuch be the miſchiefs both in public and private life reſulting from an exceſſive ſelf-eſtimation, it remains next to be conſidered whether Providence has ſupplied any medicine to correct it ; for as the reflection on excellencies, whether real or imaginary, is always attended with pleaſure to the poſſeſſor, it is a diſeaſe deeply ſeated in our nature.

Suppoſe there were a great and glorious Being always preſent with us, who had given us exiſtence with numberleſs other bleſſings, and on whom we

* —— Æquo pulſat pede pauperum tabernas
Regumque turres. HOR.

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depended each inſtant, as well for every preſent enjoyment as for every future good; ſuppoſe again, we had incurred the juſt diſpleaſure of ſuch a Being, by ingratitude and diſobedience, yet that in great mercy he had not caſt us off, but had aſſured us he was willing to pardon and reſtore us, on our humble intreaty and ſincere repentance: ſay, would not an habitual ſenſe of the preſence of this Being, ſelf-reproach for having diſpleaſed him, and an anxiety to recover his favour, be the moſt effectual antidote to pride? But ſuch are the leading diſcoveries made by the Chriſtian Revelation, and ſuch the diſpoſitions which a practical belief of it inſpires.

Humility is the firſt fruit of religion. In the mouth of our Lord there is no maxim ſo frequent as the following, *Whoſoever exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted.* Religion, and that alone, teaches *abſolute* humility, by which I mean, a ſenſe of our *abſolute* nothingneſs, in the view of infinite greatneſs and excellence. That ſenſe of inferiority, which reſults from the compariſon of men with each other, is often an unwelcome ſentiment forced upon the mind, which may rather embitter the temper than ſoften it: that which devotion impreſſes, is ſoothing and delightful. The devout man loves to lie low at the foot-ſtool of the creator, becauſe it is then he attains

the moſt lively perceptions of the divine excellence, and the moſt tranquil confidence in the divine favour. In ſo auguſt a preſence he ſees all diſtinctions loſt, and all beings reduced to the ſame level; he looks at his ſuperiors without envy, and his inferiors without contempt; and when from this elevation he deſcends to mix in ſociety, the conviction of ſuperiority which muſt in many inſtances be felt, is a calm inference of the underſtanding, and no longer a buſy, importunate paſſion of the heart.

The wicked; ſays the Pſalmiſt, *through the pride of their countenance, will not ſeek after God: God is not in all their thoughts.* When we conſider the incredible vanity of the Atheiſtical ſect, together with the ſettled malignity, and unrelenting rancour with which they purſue every veſtige of religion, —is it uncandid to ſuppoſe, that its humbling tendency is one principal cauſe of their enmity; that they are eager to diſplace a Deity from the minds of men, that they may occupy the void; to crumble the throne of the Eternal into duſt, that they may elevate themſelves on its ruins; and that, as their licentiouſneſs is impatient of reſtraint, ſo their pride diſdains a ſuperior?

We mentioned a ferocity of character, as one effect of ſceptical impiety. It is an inconvenience attending a controverſy with thoſe with whom we

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have ſo few principles in common, that we are often in danger of reaſoning inconcluſively, for the want of its being clearly known and ſettled what our opponents admit and what they deny. The perſons, for example, with whom we are at preſent engaged, have diſcarded humility and modeſty from the catalogue of virtues; on which account we have employed the more time in evincing their importance: but whatever may be thought of humility as a *virtue*, it ſurely will not be denied that inhumanity is a moſt deteſtable *vice*; a vice however, which Scepticiſm has a moſt powerful tendency to inflame.

As we have already ſhewn that pride hardens the heart, and that Religion is the only effectual antidote, the connection between irreligion and inhumanity is, in this view, obvious. But there is another light in which this part of the ſubject may be viewed, in my humble opinion, much more important though ſeldom adverted to. The ſuppoſition that man is a moral and accountable being, deſtined to ſurvive the ſtroke of death, and to live in a future world in a never ending ſtate of happineſs or miſery, makes him a creature of incomparably more *conſequence*, than the oppoſite ſuppoſition. When we conſider him as placed here by an almighty Ruler, in a ſtate of probation, and that the preſent life is his period of trial, the firſt link in a vaſt and in-

terminable chain which ſtretches into eternity, he aſſumes a dignified character in our eyes. Every thing which relates to him becomes intereſting; and to trifle with his happineſs is felt to be the moſt unpardonable levity. If ſuch be the deſtination of man, it is evident, that in the qualities which fit him for it, his principal dignity conſiſts: his moral greatneſs is his true greatneſs. Let the Sceptical principles be admitted which repreſent him, on the contrary; as the offspring of chance, connected with no ſuperior power, and ſinking into annihilation at death, and he is a contemptible creature, whoſe exiſtence and happineſs are inſignificant. The characteriſtic difference is loſt betwixt him and the brute creation, from which he is no longer diſtinguiſhed, except by the vividneſs and multiplicity of his perceptions.

If we reflect on that part of our nature which diſpoſes us to humanity, we ſhall find that, where we have no particular attachment, our ſympathy with the ſufferings, and concern for the deſtruction of ſenſitive beings, is in proportion to their ſuppoſed importance in the general ſcale; or, in other words, to their ſuppoſed capacity of enjoyment. We feel, for example, much more at witneſſing the deſtruction of a man than of an inferior animal, becauſe we conſider it as involving the extinction of a much greater ſum of happineſs

For

For the ſame reaſon, he who would ſhudder at the ſlaughter of a large animal, will ſee a thouſand inſects periſh without a pang. Our ſympathy with the calamities of our fellow-creatures is adjuſted to the ſame proportions: for we feel more powerfully affected with the diſtreſſes of fallen greatneſs, than with equal or greater diſtreſſes ſuſtained by perſons of inferior rank; becauſe, having been accuſtomed to aſſociate with an elevated ſtation the idea of ſuperior happineſs, the loſs appears the greater, and the wreck more extenſive. But the diſproportion in importance, betwixt man and the meaneſt inſect is not ſo great, as that which ſubſiſts betwixt man conſidered as *mortal* and as *immortal*; that is betwixt man as he is repreſented by the ſyſtem of Scepticiſm, and that of divine Revelation: for the enjoyment of the meaneſt inſect bears ſome proportion, though a very ſmall one. to the preſent happineſs of man; but the happineſs of time bears none at all to that of eternity. The Sceptical ſyſtem, therefore, ſinks the importance of human exiſtence to an inconceivable degree.

From theſe principles reſults the following important inference, that, to extinguiſh human life by the hand of violence, muſt be quite a different thing in the eyes of a Sceptic from what it is in thoſe of a Chriſtian. With the Sceptic it is nothing more than diverting the courſe of a little red fluid

called

called blood; it is merely leſſening the number by one of many millions of fugitive contemptible creatures: the Chriſtian ſees, in the ſame event, an accountable being cut off from a ſtate of probation, and hurried, perhaps unprepared, into the preſence of his Judge, to hear that final, that irrevocable ſentence, which is to fix him for ever in an unalterable condition of felicity or woe. The former perceives in death nothing but its phyſical circumſtances; the latter is impreſſed with the magnitude of its moral conſequences. It is the moral relation which man is ſuppoſed to bear to a ſuperior power, the awful idea of accountability, the influence which his preſent diſpoſitions and actions are conceived to have upon his eternal deſtiny, more than any ſuperiority of intellectual powers, abſtracted from theſe conſiderations, which inveſt him with ſuch myſterious grandeur, and conſtitute the firmeſt guard on the ſanctuary of human life. This reaſoning, it is true, ſerves more *immediately* to ſhew how the diſbelief of a future ſtate endangers the ſecurity of life; but though this be its *direct* conſequence, it extends by analogy much farther: ſince he, who has learned to ſport with the *lives* of his fellow creatures, will feel but little ſolicitude for their welfare in any other inſtance; but, as the greater includes the leſs, will eaſily paſs from this to all the inferior gradations of barbarity.

As

As the advantage of the armed over the unarmed is not ſeen till the moment of attack, ſo in that tranquil ſtate of ſociety, in which law and order maintain their aſcendency, it is not perceived, perhaps not even ſuſpected, to what an alarming degree the principles of modern Infidelity leave us naked and defenceleſs. But, let the ſtate be convulſed, let the mounds of regular authority be once overflowed, and the ſtill ſmall voice of law drowned in the tempeſt of popular fury (events which recent experience ſhews to be poſſible), it will then be ſeen that Atheiſm is a ſchool of ferocity; and that, having taught its diſciples to conſider mankind as little better than a neſt of inſects, they will be prepared, in the fierce conflicts of party, to trample upon them without pity, and extinguiſh them without remorſe.

It was late * before the Atheiſm of Epicurus gained footing at Rome, but its prevalence was ſoon followed by ſuch ſcenes of proſcription, confiſcation, and blood, as were *then* unparalleled in the hiſtory of the world; from which the Republic being never able to recover itſelf, after many unſucceſsful ſtruggles, exchanged liberty for repoſe, by ſubmiſſion to abſolute power. Such were the

* Neque enim aſſentior iis qui *hæc nuper* diſſerare cœperunt cum corporibus ſimul animos interire atque omnia morte deleri. *Cicero de Amicitia.*

effects

effects of Atheism at Rome. An attempt has been recently made to establish a similar system in France, the consequences of which are too well known, to render it requisite for me to shock your feelings by a recital. The only doubt that can arise is, whether the barbarities which have stained the Revolution in that unhappy country are justly chargeable on the prevalence of Atheism. Let those, who doubt of this, recollect that the men, who, by their activity and talents, prepared the minds of the people for that great change *Voltaire*, *D'Alembert*, *Diderot*, *Rousseau*, and others, were avowed enemies of Revelation; that, in all their writings, the diffusion of Scepticism and of revolutionary principles went hand in hand; that the fury of the most sanguinary parties was especially pointed against the Christian priesthood † and Religious institutions, without once

† The Author finds he has given great offence to some friends whom he highly esteems, by applying the term *Christian priesthood* to the popish clergy, He begs leave to make a remark or two by way of apology.

1. It is admitted by all candid protestants, that salvation is attainable in the Roman catholic church; but he should be glad to be informed what part of the Christian covenant entitles us to expect the salvation of those (where the Gospel is promulgated) who are not even a branch of the visible church of Christ. The papistical tenets are either *fundamentally* erroneous, on which supposition it is certain no papist can be saved,

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pretending, like other perſecutors, to execute the vengeance of God (whoſe name they never mentioned) upon his enemies; that their atrocities were committed with a wanton levity and brutal merriment; that the reign of Atheiſm was avowedly and expreſsly the reign of Terror; that in the full madneſs of their career, in the higheſt climax of their horrors, they ſhut up the temples of God, aboliſhed his worſhip, and proclaimed death to be an eternal ſleep; as if, by pointing to the ſilence of the ſepulchre, and the ſleep of the dead, theſe ferocious barbarians meant to apologiſe for leaving neither ſleep, quiet, nor repoſe to the living.

or their errors muſt be conſiſtent with Chriſtian faith, and conſequently cannot be a valid reaſon for excluding thoſe who maintain them from being a part (a moſt corrupt part, if you pleaſe, but ſtill a part) of the Chriſtian church.

2. The popiſh clergy were perſecuted under the *character of Chriſtians*, not under the notion of Heretics or Schiſmatics. They, who were the ſubjects of perſecution, were certainly the beſt judges of its aim and direction: and when the Archbiſhop of Paris, and others, endeavoured to ſcreen themſelves from its effects by a recantation, what did they recant? Was it popery? no; but the profeſſion of Chriſtianity. Theſe Apoſtates, doubtleſs, meant to remove the ground of offence, which, in their opinion, was the Chriſtian profeſſion. If the ſoundeſt Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtorians have not refuſed the honours of martyrdom to ſuch as ſuffered in the cauſe of truth amongſt the Gnoſtics, it ill becomes the liberality of the preſent age to

As the heathens fabled that Minerva iſſued full armed from the head of Jupiter; ſo no ſooner were the ſpeculations of Atheiſtical philoſophy matured, than they gave birth to a ferocity which converted the moſt poliſhed people in Europe into a horde of aſſaſſins; the ſeat of voluptuous refinement, of pleaſure and of arts, into a theatre of blood.

Having already ſhewn, that the principles of infidelity facilitate the commiſſion of crimes by removing the reſtraints of fear, and that they foſter the arrogance of the individual, while they inculcate the moſt deſpicable opinion of the ſpecies; the inevitable reſult is, that a haughty ſelf-confi-

contemplate, with ſullen indifference, or malicious joy, the ſufferings of conſcientious catholics.

3. At the period to which the Author refers, Chriſtian worſhip, of *every kind*, was prohibited, while, in ſolemn mockery of religion, adoration was paid to a ſtrumpet, under the title of the goddeſs of reaſon. Is it neceſſary to prove that men, who were thus abandoned, muſt be hoſtile to true religion, under every form? or, if there be any gradations in their abhorrence, to that moſt which is the moſt pure and perfect? Are atheiſm and obſcenity more congenial to the proteſtant than to the popiſh profeſſion? To have incurred the hatred of the ruling party of France at the ſeaſon alluded to, is an honour which the author would be ſorry to reſign, as the excluſive boaſt of the church of Rome: to have been the object of the partiality of ſuch bloody and inhuman monſters, would have been a ſtain upon Proteſtants which the virtue of ages could not obliterate.

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dence, a contempt of mankind, together with a daring defiance of religious reſtraints; are the natural ingredients of the Atheiſtical character; nor is it leſs evident that theſe are, of all others, the diſpoſitions which moſt forcibly ſtimulate to violence and cruelty.

Settle it therefore in your minds, as a maxim never to be effaced or forgotten, that Atheiſm is an inhuman, bloody, ferocious ſyſtem, equally hoſtile to every uſeful reſtraint, and to every virtuous affection; that, leaving nothing above us to excite awe, nor around us to awaken tenderneſs; it wages war with heaven and with earth; its firſt object is to dethrone God, its next to deſtroy man *.

There is a third vice not leſs deſtructive than either of thoſe which have been already mentioned, to which the ſyſtem of modern Infidelity is favourable; that is, unbridled ſenſuality, the licentious and unreſtrained indulgence of thoſe paſſions which are eſſential to the continuation of the ſpecies. The magnitude of thoſe paſſions, and their ſupreme importance to the exiſtence as well

* As human nature is the ſame in all ages, it is not ſurpriſing to find the ſame moral ſyſtems, even in the moſt diſſimilar circumſtances, produce correſponding effects. *Joſephus* remarks that the Sadducees, a kind of Jewiſh Infidels, whoſe tenets were the denial of a moral government and a future ſtate, were diſtinguiſhed from the other ſects by their ferocity. *De Bell. Jud. lib.* 2. He elſewhere remarks, that they were eminent for their inhumanity in their judicial capacity.

as the peace and welfare of ſociety, have rendered it one of the chief objects of ſolicitude with every wiſe legiſlature, to reſtrain them by ſuch laws, and to confine their indulgence within ſuch limits, as ſhall beſt promote the great ends for which they were implanted.

The Benevolence and wiſdom of the Author of Chriſtianity are eminently conſpicuous in the laws he has enacted on this branch of morals; for, while he authoriſes Marriage, he reſtrains the vagrancy and caprice of the paſſions, by forbidding Polygamy and Divorce; and, well knowing that offences againſt the laws of chaſtity uſually ſpring from an ill-regulated imagination, he inculcates purity of heart. Among innumerable benefits which the world has derived from the Chriſtian Religion, a ſuperior refinement in the ſexual ſentiments, a more equal and reſpectful treatment of women, greater dignity and permanence conferred on the inſtitution of Marriage, are not the leaſt conſiderable: in conſequence of which the pureſt affections, and the moſt ſacred duties, are graſted on the ſtock of the ſtrongeſt inſtincts.

The aim of all the leading champions of Infidelity is, to rob mankind of theſe benefits, and throw them back into a ſtate of groſs and brutal ſenſuality. Mr. *Hume* repreſents the private conduct of the profligate *Charles*. whoſe debauche-

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cheries polluted the age, as a juſt ſubject of panegyric. A diſciple in the ſame ſchool has lately had the unbluſhing effrontery to ſtigmatiſe Marriage as the worſt of all monopolies; and, in a narrative of his licentious amours, to make a formal apology for departing from his principles, by ſubmitting to its reſtraint. The popular productions on the continent, which iſſue from the Atheiſtical ſchool, are inceſſantly directed to the ſame purpoſe.

Under every poſſible aſpect in which Infidelity can be viewed, it extends the dominion of ſenſuality: it repeals and abrogates every law by which divine Revelation has, under ſuch awful ſanctions, reſtrained the indulgence of the paſſions: the diſbelief of a ſupreme omniſcient Being which it inculcates, releaſes its diſciples from an attention to the *heart*, from every care but that of outward decorum; and the excluſion of the devout affections and an unſeen world, leaves the mind immerſed in viſible, ſenſible objects.

There are two ſorts of pleaſures, corporeal and mental: Though we are indebted to the ſenſes for all our perceptions *originally*, yet thoſe, which are at the fartheſt remove from their *immediate impreſſions*, confer the moſt elevation on the character, ſince, in proportion as they are multiplied

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and augmented, the ſlaviſh ſubjection to the ſenſes is ſubdued. Hence the true and only antidote to debaſing ſenſuality is, the poſſeſſion of a fund of that *kind of enjoyment* which is independent of the corporeal appetites. Inferior in the perfection of ſeveral of his ſenſes to different parts of the brute creation, the ſuperiority of man over them all conſiſts in his ſuperior power of multiplying, by new combinations, his mental perceptions, and thereby of creating to himſelf reſources of happineſs, ſeparate from external ſenſation. In the ſcale of enjoyment, the firſt remove from ſenſe are the pleaſures of reaſon and ſociety; the next are the pleaſures of Devotion and Religion. The former, though totally diſtinct from thoſe of ſenſe, are yet leſs perfectly adapted to moderate their exceſſes than the laſt; as they are in a great meaſure converſant with viſible and ſenſible objects---The religious ſentiments and affections are, in fact, and were intended to be, the *proper antagoniſt* of ſenſuality, the great deliverer from the thraldom of the appetites; by opening a ſpiritual world, and inſpiring hopes, and fears, and conſolations, and joys, which bear no relation to the material and inviſible univerſe. The criminal indulgence of ſenſual paſſions admits but of two modes of prevention; the eſtabliſhment of ſuch laws and maxims in ſociety as ſhall render lewd profligacy impracticable or infamous,

famous ; or, the infuſion of ſuch principles and habits as ſhall render it diſtaſteful : human legiſlatures have encountered the diſeaſe in the firſt, the truths and ſanctions of revealed religion, in the laſt of theſe methods : to both of which the advocates of modern Infidelity are equally hoſtile.

So much has been ſaid by many able writers to evince the inconceivable benefit of the marriage inſtitution, that to hear it ſeriouſly attacked by men who ſtile themſelves Philoſophers, at the cloſe of the eighteenth century, muſt awaken indignation and ſurpriſe. The object of this diſcourſe leads us to direct our attention particularly to the influence of this inſtitution, on the *civilization* of the world.

From the records of Revelation we learn, that Marriage, or the *permanent union* of the ſexes, was ordained by God, and exiſted under different modifications in the early infancy of mankind, without which they could never have emerged from barbariſm. For, conceive only what eternal diſcord, jealouſy and violence would enſue, were the objects of the tendereſt affections ſecured to their poſſeſſor by no law or tie of moral obligation ; were domeſtic enjoyments diſturbed by inceſſant fear, and licentiouſneſs inflamed by hope. Who could find ſufficient tranquillity of mind, to enable him to plan or execute any continued ſcheme of action, or what room for arts, or ſciences, or religion,

religion, or virtue, in that ſtate in which the chief earthly happineſs was expoſed to every lawleſs invader; where one was racked with an inceſſant anxiety to keep what the other was equally eager to acquire? It is not probable in itſelf, independent of the light of ſcripture, that the benevolent Author of the human race ever placed them in ſo wretched a condition at firſt; it is certain they could not remain in it long without being exterminated. Marriage, by ſhutting out theſe evils, and enabling every man to reſt ſecure in his enjoyments, is the great civilizer of the world; with this ſecurity the mind is at liberty to expand in generous affections, has leiſure to look abroad, and engage in the purſuits of knowledge, ſcience, and virtue.

Nor is it in this way only that marriage inſtitutions are eſſential to the welfare of mankind. They are ſources of tenderneſs, as well as the guardians of peace. Without the permanent union of the ſexes, there can be no permanent families: the diſſolution of nuptial ties involves the diſſolution of domeſtic ſociety. But domeſtic ſociety is the ſeminary of ſocial affections, the cradle of ſenſibility, where the firſt elements are acquired of that tenderneſs and humanity, which cement mankind together, and which, were they entirely extinguiſhed, the whole fabric of ſocial inſtitutions would be diſſolved.

Families

Families are ſo many centres of attraction, which preſerve mankind from being ſcattered and diſſipated by the repulſive powers of ſelfiſhneſs. The order of nature is, evermore, from particulars to generals. As, in the operations of intellect, we proceed from the contemplation of individuals to the formation of general abſtractions, ſo in the developement of the paſſions, in like manner, we advance from private to public affections, from the love of parents, brothers, and ſiſters, to thoſe more expanded regards, which embrace the immenſe ſociety of human kind *

In order to render men benevolent, they muſt firſt be made tender : for benevolent affections are not the offspring of reaſoning; they reſult from that culture of the heart, from thoſe early impreſſions of tenderneſs, gratitude, and ſympathy, which the endearments of domeſtic life are ſure to ſupply, and for the formation of which it is the beſt poſſible ſchool..

The advocates of Infidelity invert this eternal order of nature. Inſtead of inculcating the pri-

* Arctior vero colligatio ſocietatis propinquorum : ab illa enim immenſa ſocietate humani generis, in exiguum anguſtumque concluditur, nam cum ſit hoc natura commune animantium ut habeant libidinem procreandi prima ſocietas in ipſo conjugio eſt, proxima in liberis, deinde una domus, communia omnia. Id autem eſt principium urbis, et quaſi ſeminarium reipublicæ. *Cic. de Off.*

vate affections as a diſcipline by which the mind is prepared for thoſe of a more public nature, they ſet them in direct oppoſition to each other; they propoſe to build general benevolence on the deſtruction of individual tenderneſs, and to make us love the whole ſpecies more, by loving every particular part of it leſs. In purſuit of this chimerical project, gratitude, humility, conjugal, parental, and filial affection, together with every other ſocial diſpoſition, are reprobated; virtue is limited to a paſſionate attachment to the general good. Is it not natural to aſk, when all the tenderneſs of life is extinguiſhed, and all the bands of ſociety are untwiſted, from whence this ardent affection for the general good is to ſpring?,

When this ſavage philoſophy has completed its work, when it has taught its diſciple to look with perfect indifference on the offſpring of his body and the wife of his boſom, to eſtrange himſelf from his friends, inſult his benefactors, and ſilence the pleadings of gratitude and pity; will he, by thus diveſting himſelf of all that is human, be better prepared for the diſintereſted love of his ſpecies? Will he become a philanthropiſt only becauſe he has ceaſed to be a man? Rather, in this total exemption from all the feelings which humanize and ſoften, in this chilling froſt of univerſal indifference, may we not be certain ſelfiſhneſs, unmingled and uncontrouled, will aſſume the empire

pire of his heart; and that, under pretence of advancing the general good, an object to which the fancy may give innumerable shapes, he will be prepared for the violation of every duty, and the perpetration of every crime? Extended benevolence is the last and most perfect fruit of the private affections; so that to expect to reap the former from the extinction of the latter, is to oppose the means to the end; is as absurd as to attempt to reach the summit of the highest mountain, without passing through the intermediate spaces, or to hope to attain the heights of science by forgetting the first elements of knowledge. These absurdities have sprung, however, in the advocates of Infidelity, from an ignorance of human nature, sufficient to disgrace even those who did not stile themselves Philosophers. Presuming, contrary to the experience of every moment, that the affections are awakened by *reasoning*, and perceiving that the general good is an incomparably greater *object in itself*, than the happiness of any limited number of individuals, they inferred nothing more was necessary than to exhibit it in its just dimensions; to draw the *affections* towards it; as though the fact of the superior populousness of China to Great Britain, needed but to be known, to render us indifferent to our domestic concerns, and lead us to direct all our anxiety, to the prosperity of that vast, but remote Empire.

It

It is not the province of reaſon to awaken new paſſions, or open new ſources of ſenſibility, but to direct us in the attainment of thoſe objects which nature has already rendered pleaſing, or to determine among the interfering inclinations and paſſions which ſway the mind, which are the fitteſt to be preferred.

Is a regard to the general good then, you will reply, to be excluded from the motives of action? Nothing is more remote from my intention: but as the nature of this motive has, in my opinion, been much miſunderſtood by ſome good men, and abuſed by others of a different deſcription, to the worſt of purpoſes, permit me to declare, in a few words, what appears to me to be the truth on this ſubject.

The welfare of the whole ſyſtem of being muſt be allowed to be, *in itſelf*, the object of all others the moſt worthy of being purſued; ſo that, could the mind diſtinctly embrace it, and diſcern at every ſtep *what action* would infallibly promote it, we ſhould be furniſhed with a ſure criterion of right and wrong, an unerring guide which would ſuperſede the uſe and neceſſity of all inferior rules, laws, and principles.

But this being impoſſible, ſince the good of the *whole* is a motive ſo looſe and indeterminate, and embraces ſuch an infinity of relations, that before

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we could be certain what action it prescribed, the season of action would be past; to weak, short-sighted mortals, Providence has assigned a sphere of agency, less grand and extensive indeed, but better suited to their limited powers, by implanting certain *affections* which it is their duty to cultivate, and suggesting particular rules to which they are bound to conform. By these provisions, the boundaries of virtue are easily ascertained, at the same time that its ultimate object, the good of the whole, is secured; for, since the happiness of the entire system results from the happiness of the several parts, the affections which confine the attention *immediately* to the latter, conspire in the end to the promotion of the former; as the labourer whose industry is limited to the corner of a large building, performs his part towards rearing the structure, much more effectually than if he extended his care to the whole.

As the interest, however, of any limited number of persons may not only not contribute, but may possibly be directly opposed to the general good; the interest of a family, for example, to that of a province, or, of a nation to that of the world; Providence has so ordered it, that in a well regulated mind there springs up, as we have already seen, besides particular attachments, *an extended regard to the species*, whose office is two-

fold

fold ; not to *deſtroy* and *extinguiſh* the more private affections, which is mental parricide ; but firſt, as far as is conſiſtent with the claims of thoſe who are immediately committed to our care, *to do good to all men* ; ſecondly, to exerciſe a juriſdiction and controll over the private affections, ſo as to prohibit their indulgence, whenever it would be attended with *manifeſt detriment* to the whole. Thus every part of our nature is brought into action ; all the practical principles of the human heart find an element to move in, each in its different ſort and manner, conſpiring, without mutual colliſions, to maintain the harmony of the world and the happineſs of the univerſe.*

* It is ſomewhat ſingular, that many of the faſhionable Infidels have hit upon a definition of virtue, which perfectly coincides with that of certain metaphyſical divines in America, firſt invented and defended by that moſt acute reaſoner, *Jonathan Edwards*. They both place virtue, excluſively, in a paſſion for the general good, or, as Mr. *Edwards* expreſſes it, *love to Being in general* ; ſo that our love is always to be proportioned to the magnitude of its object in the great ſcale of Being ; which is liable to the objections I have already ſtated as well as to many others, which the limits of this note will not permit me to enumerate. Let it ſuffice to remark, 1. That virtue on theſe principles is an utter impoſſibility ; for the ſyſtem of Being comprehending the great Supreme, is *infinite*, and therefore to maintain the proper proportion, the force of particular attachment muſt be infinitely leſs than the paſſion for the general good ; but the limits of the human mind are not ca-

Before

Before I close this discourse, I cannot omit to mention three circumstances attending the propagation of Infidelity, by its present abettors, equally new and alarming.

1. It is the first attempt which has been ever witnessed on an extensive scale, to establish *the principles of Atheism*; the first effort which history has recorded to disannul and extinguish the belief of all superior powers; the consequence of which, should it succeed, will be to place mankind in a situation never before experienced, not

pable of any emotions so infinitely different *in degree*. 2. Since *our views* of the extent of the universe are capable of perpetual enlargement, admitting the sum of existence is ever the same, we must return back at each step to diminish the strength of particular affections, or they will become disproportionate, and consequently on these principles vicious; so that the balance must be continually fluctuating, by the weights being taken out of one scale and put into the other. 3. If virtue consist *exclusively* in love to Being in general, or attachment to the general good, the particular affections are, to every purpose of virtue, useless, and even pernicious; for their immediate, nay their necessary tendency is, to attract to their objects a proportion of attention, which far exceeds their comparative value in the general scale. To alledge that the *general good* is promoted by them will be of no advantage to the defence of this system, but the contrary, by confessing that a greater sum of happiness is attained by a deviation from, than an adherence to, its principles; unless its advocates mean by the love of Being in general, the same thing as the private affections, which is

even

during the ages of pagan darkneſs. The ſyſtem of Polytheiſm was as remote from modern Infidelity as from true Religion. Amidſt that rubbiſh of ſuperſtition, the product of fear, ignorance and vice, which had been accumulating for ages, ſome faint embers of ſacred truth remained unextinguiſhed; the interpoſition of unſeen powers in the affairs of men was believed and revered, the ſanctity of oaths was maintained, the idea of *revelation* and of *tradition* as a ſource of religious knowledge, was familiar, a uſeful perſuaſion of the exiſtence of a future world was kept alive, and the greater Gods were looked up to as the guardians of the public welfare, the Patrons of thoſe virtues

to confound all the diſtinctions of language, as well as all the operations of mind. Let it be remembered, we have no diſpute what is the ultimate end of virtue, which is allowed on both ſides to be the greateſt ſum of happineſs in the univerſe: the queſtion is merely, what is *virtue itſelf?* or, in other words, what are the means appointed for the attainment of that end

There is little doubt from ſome part of Mr. *Godwin's* work entitled "*Political Juſtice*," as well as from his early habits of reading, that he was indebted to Mr. *Edwards* for his principal arguments againſt the private affections; though with a daring conſiſtence, he has purſued his principles to an extreme from which that moſt excellent man would have revolted with horror—The fundamental error of the whole ſyſtem aroſe, as I conceive, from a miſtaken purſuit of ſimplicity; from a wiſh to conſtruct a moral ſyſtem without leaving ſufficient ſcope for the infinite variety of moral phœnomena and mental

which

which promote the prosperity of states, and the avengers of injustice, perfidy, and fraud *.

combination, in consequence of which, its advocates were induced to place virtue *exclusively* in some *one disposition* of mind, and since the passion for the general good is undeniably the *noblest* and most extensive of all others, when it was once resolved to place virtue in any *one thing*, there remained little room to hesitate which should be preferred. It might have been worth while to reflect, that in the Natural world there are two kinds of attraction; one, which holds the several *parts* of individual bodies in contact; another, which maintains the union of bodies themselves with the general system; and that though the union in the former case is much more *intimate* than in the latter, they are equally essential to the order of the world. Similar to this is the relation which the public and private affections bear to each other, and their use in the Moral system.

* The testimony of *Polybius*, to the beneficial effects which resulted from the system of Pagan superstition, in fortifying the sentiments of moral obligation, and supporting the sanctity of oaths, is so weighty and decisive, that it would be an injustice to the subject not to insert it: more especially as it is impossible to attribute it to the influence of credulity on the author himself, who was, evidently, a sceptic. It is scarcely necessary to remark, that all the benefits which might in any way flow from superstition, are secured to an incomparably greater degree by the belief of true Religion.

"But among all the useful institutions," says *Polybius*, "that demonstrate the superior excellence of the Roman government, the most considerable, perhaps, is the opinion which the people are taught to hold concerning the Gods; and that which other

Of whatever benefit ſuperſtition might formerly be productive, by the ſcattered particles of truth which it contained, theſe advantages can now only be reaped from the ſoil of true Religion; nor is there any other alternative left than the belief of Chriſtianity, or abſolute Atheiſm. In the revolution, of the human mind, exploded *opinions* are

men regard as an object of diſgrace, appears in my judgment to be the very thing by which this republic is chiefly ſuſtained. I mean ſuperſtition; which is impreſſed, with all its terrors and influences, both on the private actions of the citizens and the public adminiſtration of the ſtate, to a degree that can ſcarcely be exceeded.

"The ancients therefore acted not abſurdly, nor without good reaſon, when they inculcated the notions concerning the Gods, and the belief of infernal puniſhments; but much rather *are thoſe of the preſent age to be charged with raſhneſs and abſurdity* in endeavouring to extirpate theſe opinions; for, not to mention other effects that flow from ſuch an inſtitution, if, among the Greeks, for example, a ſingle talent only be intruſted to thoſe who have the management of any of the public money, though they give ten written ſureties, with as many ſeals, and twice as many witneſſes, they are unable to diſcharge the truſt repoſed in them with integrity. But the Romans, on the other hand, who in the courſe of their magiſtracies and in embaſſies diſburſe the greateſt ſums, are prevailed on, by the ſingle obligation of an oath, to perform their duty with inviolable honeſty. And as, in other ſtates, a man is rarely to be found whoſe hands are pure from public robbery, ſo, amongſt the Romans, it is no leſs rare to diſcover one that is tainted with this crime." *Hampton's Polybius. Vol. 3. B. 6.*

often

often revived, but an exploded superstition never recovers its credit. The pretension to divine Revelation is so august and commanding, that, when its falsehood is once discerned, it is covered with all the ignominy of detected imposture; it falls from such a height (to change the figure) that it is inevitably crumbled into atoms. Religions, whether false or true, are not creatures of arbitrary institution. After discrediting the principles of piety, should our modern Free-thinkers find it necessary,

Though the system of Paganism is justly condemned by reason and Scripture, yet it assumed as true several principles of the first importance to the preservation of public manners; such as a persuasion of invisible power, of the folly of incurring the divine vengeance for the attainment of any present advantage, and the divine approbation of virtue; so that, strictly speaking, it was the mixture of truth in it which gave it all its utility; which is well stated by the *great* and *judicious* HOOKER in treating on this subject. "Seeing, therefore, it doth thus appear," says that venerable Author, "that the safety of all states dependeth upon religion; that religion unfeignedly loved perfecteth men's abilities unto all kinds of virtuous services in the commonwealth; that men's desire is, in general, to hold no religion but the true, and that whatever good effects do grow out of their religion, who embrace, instead of the true, a false, the roots thereof are certain sparks of the light of truth intermingled with the darkness of error, because no religion can wholly and only consist of untruths, we have reason to think that all true virtues are to honour *true religion* as their parent, and all well ordered Common-weales to love her as their chiefest stay." *Eccles. Pol. B.* 5.

in order to reſtrain the exceſſes of ferocity, to ſeek for a ſubſtitute in ſome popular ſuperſtition, it will prove a vain and impracticable attempt: they may recal the names, reſtore the altars, and revive the ceremonies, but to rekindle the ſpirit of Heathenism will exceed their power; becauſe it is impoſſible to enact ignorance by law, or to repeal, by legiſlative authority, the dictates of reaſon, and the light of ſcience.

2. The efforts of Infidels, to diffuſe the principles of Infidelity among the common people, is another alarming ſymptom peculiar to the preſent time. *Hume*, *Bolingbroke* and *Gibbon* addreſſed themſelves ſolely to the more poliſhed claſſes of the community, and would have thought their refined ſpeculations debaſed by an attempt to enliſt diſciples from among the populace. Infidelity has lately grown condeſcending: bred in the ſpeculations of a daring philoſophy, immured at firſt in the cloiſters of the learned, and afterwards nurſed in the lap of voluptuouſneſs and of courts; having at length reached its full maturity, it boldly ventures to challenge the ſuffrages of the people, ſolicits the acquaintance of peaſants and mechanics, and ſeeks to draw whole nations to its ſtandard.

It is not difficult to account for this new ſtate of things. While Infidelity was rare, it was employed as the inſtrument of literary vanity; its

wide

wide diffuſion having diſqualified it for anſwering that purpoſe, it is now adopted as the organ of political convulſion. Literary diſtinction is conferred by the approbation of a few; but the total ſubverſion and overthrow of ſociety demands the concurrence of millions.

3. The Infidels of the preſent day are the firſt Sophiſts who have preſumed to innovate in the very *ſubſtance* of morals. The diſputes on moral queſtions hitherto agitated amongſt Philoſophers have reſpected the *grounds* of duty, not the *nature of duty itſelf*; or they have been merely metaphyſical, and related to the *hiſtory* of moral ſentiments in the mind, the ſources and principles from which they were moſt eaſily deduced; they never turned on the quality of thoſe diſpoſitions and actions which were to be denominated virtuous. In the firm perſuaſion that the love and fear of the ſupreme Being, the ſacred obſervation of promiſes and oaths, reverence to magiſtrates, obedience to parents, gratitude to benefactors, conjugal fidelity, and parental tenderneſs, were primary virtues, and the chief ſupport of every common-wealth, they were unanimous. The curſe denounced upon ſuch as remove ancient land-marks, upon thoſe who call good evil and evil good, put light for darkneſs and darkneſs for light, who employ their faculties to ſubvert the eternal diſtinctions of right and

and wrong, and thus to poiſon the ſtreams of virtue at their ſource, falls with accumulated weight on the advocates of modern Infidelity, and on them alone.

Permit me to cloſe this diſcourſe with a few ſerious reflections. There is much, it muſt be confeſſed in the apoſtacy of multitudes, and the rapid progreſs of Infidelity, to awaken our fears for the virtue of the riſing generation; but nothing to ſhake our faith, nothing which Scripture itſelf does not give us room to expect. The features which compoſe the character of Apoſtates, their prophaneneſs; preſumption, lewdneſs, impatience of ſubordination, reſtleſs appetite for change, vain pretenſions to freedom and to emancipate the world, while themſelves are the ſlaves of luſt, the weapons with which they attack Chriſtianity and the ſnares they ſpread for the unwary, are depicted in the cleareſt colours by the pencil of prophecy. *Knowing this firſt*, ſays PETER, *that there ſhall come, in the laſt days, ſcoffers, walking after their own luſts**. In the ſame epiſtle he more fully deſcribes the perſons he alludes to; *as chiefly them which walk after the fleſh, in the luſt of uncleanneſs, and deſpiſe government; preſumptuous are they, ſelf-willed, they are not afraid to ſpeak evil of dignities; ſporting themſelves in their own deceivings, having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot ceaſe from ſin; beguiling unſtable ſouls;*

* 2 Peter, iii. v. 3, † 2 Peter, ii.

For

For when they ſpeak great ſwelling words of vanity, they allure through the luſts of the fleſh, through much wantonneſs, thoſe that were clean eſcaped from them who live in error; while they promiſe them liberty, they themſelves are the ſervants of corruption†. Of the ſame characters JUDE admoniſhes us, *to remember that they were foretold as mockers, who ſhould be in the laſt time, who ſhould walk after their own ungodly luſts. Theſe be they*, he adds, *who ſeparate themſelves* (by apoſtacy) *ſenſual, not having the ſpirit.* Infidelity is an evil of ſhort duration. "*It has*," as a judicious writer obſerves, "*no individual ſubſiſtence given it in the ſyſtem of prophecy. It is not a* BEAST, *but a mere putrid excreſcence of the papal beaſt; an excreſcence which, though it may diffuſe death through every vein of the body on which it grew, yet ſhall die along with it* *." Its enormities will haſten its overthrow. It is impoſſible that a ſyſtem, which, by vilifying every virtue, and embracing the patronage of almoſt every vice and crime, wages war with all the order and civilization of the world; which, equal to the eſtabliſhment of nothing, is armed only with the energies of deſtruction, can long retain an aſcendency. It is in no ſhape formed for perpetuity. Sudden in its riſe, and impetuous in its

* See an excellent work, lately publiſhed by the Rev. *A. Fuller*, entitled *The Goſpel its own Witneſs.* Sold by Mr. *Button.*

progreſs,

progreſs, it reſembles a mountain torrent, which is loud, filthy, and deſolating; but being fed by no perennial ſpring, is ſoon drained off and diſappears. By permitting, to a certain extent, the prevalence of Infidelity, Providence is preparing new triumphs for Religion. In aſſerting its authority, the Preachers of the Goſpel have hitherto found it neceſſary to weigh the proſpects of immortality againſt the intereſts of time, to ſtrip the world of its charms, to inſiſt on the deceitfulneſs of pleaſure, the unſatisfying nature of riches, the emptineſs of grandeur, and the nothingneſs of a mere worldly life. Topics of this nature will always have their uſe; but it is not by ſuch repreſentations alone, that the importance of religion is evinced. The prevalence of impiety has armed us with new weapons in its defence.

Religion being primarily intended to make men *wiſe unto ſalvation*, the ſupport it miniſters to ſocial order, the ſtability it confers on government and laws, is a *ſubordinate ſpecies* of advantag which we ſhould have continued to enloy without reflecting on its cauſe, but for the developement of deiſtical principles and the experiment which has been made of their effects in a neighbouring country. It had been the conſtant boaſt of Infidels, that their ſyſtem, more liberal and generous than Chriſtianity, needed but to be tried to produce an immenſe

menſe acceſſion to human happineſs; and Chriſtian nations, careleſs and ſupine, retaining little of Religion but the profeſſion, and diſguſted with its reſtraints, lent a favourable ear to theſe pretenſions. God permitted the trial to be made: In one country, and that the centre of Chriſtendom, Revelation underwent a total eclipſe*, while Atheiſm performing on a darkened theatre its ſtrange and fearful tragedy, confounded the firſt elements of ſociety, blended every age, rank and ſex, in indiſcriminate proſcription and maſſacre, and convulſed all Europe to its centre: that the imperiſhable memorial of theſe events might teach the laſt generations of mankind, to conſider Religion as the pillar of ſociety, the ſafeguard of nations, the parent of ſocial order, which alone has power to curb the fury of the paſſions, and ſecure to every one his rights; to the laborious the reward of their induſtry, to the rich the enjoyment of their wealth, to nobles the preſervation of their honours, and to princes the ſtability of their thrones.

* It is worthy of attention that *Mercier* a warm advocate of the French Revolution, and a profeſſed Deiſt, in his recent work, entitled "*New Paris*," acknowledges and laments the extinction of Religion in France. "*We have*," ſays he, *in proſcribing ſuperſtition, deſtroyed all religious ſentiment: but this is not the way to regenerate the world.*" See Appendix to the 30th Vol. MONTHLY REVIEW.

We might aſk the Patrons of Infidelity, what fury impels them to attempt the ſubverſion of Chriſtianity? Is it that they have diſcovered a better ſyſtem? To what virtues are their principles favourable, or is there one which Chriſtians have not carried to a higher perfection than any of whom their party can boaſt? Have they diſcovered a more excellent rule of life, or a better hope in death, than that which the Scriptures ſuggeſt? Above all, what are the pretenſions on which they reſt their claims to be the guides of mankind; or which embolden them to expect we ſhould trample upon the experience of ages, and abandon a Religion, which has been atteſted by a train of miracles and prophecies, in which millions of our forefathers have found a refuge in every trouble, and conſolation in the hour of death; a Religion which has been adorned with the higheſt ſanctity of character and ſplendour of talents, which enrols amongſt its diſciples the names of BACON, NEWTON, and LOCKE, the glory of their ſpecies, and to which theſe illuſtrious men were proud to dedicate the laſt and beſt fruits of their immortal genius?

If the queſtion at iſſue is to be decided by argument, nothing can be added to the triumph of Chriſtianity; if by an appeal to authority, what have our adverſaries to oppoſe to theſe great names?

names? Where are the Infidels of such pure, uncontaminated morals, unshaken probity, and extended benevolence, that we should be in danger of being seduced into impiety by their example? Into what obscure receſſes of misery, into what dungeons, have their Philanthropists penetrated to lighten the fetters and relieve the sorrows of the helpless captive? What barbarous tribes have their Apostles visited, what distant climes have *they* explored, encompassed with cold, nakedness and want, to diffuse principles of virtue and the blessings of civilization? Or will they rather chuse to wave their pretensions to this extraordinary, and in their eyes, eccentric species of benevolence (for Infidels, we know, are sworn enemies to enthusiasm of every sort) and rest their character on their political exploits, on their efforts to reanimate the virtue of a sinking state, to restrain licentiousness, to calm the tumult of popular fury, and by inculcating the spirit of justice, moderation, and pity for fallen greatness, to mitigate the inevitable horrors of revolution? Our adversaries will at least have the discretion, if not the modesty, to recede from this test.

More than all, their infatuated eagerness, their parricidal zeal to extinguish a sense of Deity, must excite astonishment and horror. Is the idea of an Almighty and perfect Ruler, unfriendly to

any paſſion which is conſiſtent with innocence, or an obſtruction to any deſign which it is not ſhameful to avow? Eternal God! on what are thine enemies intent: what are thoſe enterpriſes of guilt and horror, that, for the ſafety of their performers, require to be enveloped in a darkneſs which the eye of Heaven muſt not pierce!—Miſerable men! proud of being the offspring of chance; in love with univerſal diſorder, whoſe happineſs is involved in the belief of there being no witneſs to their deſigns, and who are at eaſe only becauſe they ſuppoſe themſelves inhabitants of a forſaken and fatherleſs world!.

Having been led by the nature of the ſubject to conſider chiefly, the manner in which ſceptical impiety affects the welfare of ſtates, it is the more requiſite to warn you againſt that moſt fatal miſtake of regarding Religion as an engine of policy; and to recal to your recollection, that the concern we have in it, is much more as *individuals* than as *collective bodies*, and far leſs temporal than eternal. The happineſs it confers in the preſent life are bleſſings which it ſcatters by the way in its march to immortality. That future condition of being which it aſcertains, and for which its promiſes and truths are meant to prepare us, is the ultimate end of human ſocieties, the final ſcope and object of preſent exiſtence, in compari-

ſon

ſon of which, all the revolutions of nations, and all the viciſſitudes of time, are light and tranſitory. *Godlineſs has*, it is true, *the promiſe of the life that now is*, but chiefly *of that which is to come.* Other acquiſitions may be requiſite to make men great; but be aſſured, the Religion of Jeſus is alone ſufficient to make them good and happy. Powerful ſources of conſolation in ſorrow, unſhaken fortitude amidſt the changes and perturbations of the world, humility remote from meanneſs, and dignity unſtained by pride, contentment in every ſtation, paſſions pure and calm, with habitual ſerenity, the full enjoyment of life, undiſturbed by the dread of diſſolution, or the fear of an hereafter, are its invaluable gifts. To theſe enjoyments, however, you will neceſſarily continue ſtrangers, unleſs you reſign yourſelves wholly to its power; for the conſolations of Religion are reſerved to reward, to ſweeten, and to ſtimulate obedience. Many without renouncing the profeſſion of Chriſtianity, without formally rejecting its diſtinguiſhing doctrines, live in ſuch an habitual violation of its laws, and contradiction to its ſpirit, that conſcious they have more to fear than to hope from its truth, they are never able to contemplate it without terror. It haunts their imagination, inſtead of tranquillizing their hearts, and hangs with depreſſing weight on all their enjoyments

joyments and purſuits. Their religion, inſtead of comforting them under their troubles, is itſelf their greateſt trouble, from which they ſeek refuge in the diſſipation and vanity of the world, until the throbs and tumults of conſcience force them back upon Religion. Thus ſuſpended betwixt oppoſite powers, the ſport of contradictory influences, they are diſqualified for the happineſs of both worlds, and neither enjoy the pleaſures of ſin, nor the peace of piety. Is it ſurpriſing to find a mind bewildered in uncertainty, and diſſatisfied with itſelf, court deception, and embrace with eagerneſs every pretext to mutilate the claims and enervate the authority of Chriſtianity, forgetting that it is of the very eſſence of the religious principle to preſide and control, and that it is impoſſible to *ſerve God and mammon?* It is this claſs of profeſſors, who are chiefly in danger of being entangled in the ſnares of infidelity.

The champions of Infidelity have much more reaſon to be aſhamed, than to boaſt, of ſuch converts. For what can be a ſtronger preſumption of the falſhood of a ſyſtem, than that it is the opiate of a reſtleſs conſcience; that it prevails with minds of a certain deſcription, not becauſe they find it true, but becauſe they feel it neceſſary; and that, in adopting it, they conſult leſs with their reaſon, than with their vices and their fears? It

requires

requires but little ſagacity to foreſee that ſpeculations which originate in guilt, muſt end in ruin. Infidels are not themſelves ſatisfied with the truth of their ſyſtem ; for had they any ſettled aſſurance of its principles, in conſequence of calm diſpaſſionate inveſtigation, they would never diſturb the quiet of the world by their attempts to proſelyte ; but would lament their own infelicity in not bring able to perceive ſufficient evidence for the truth of a Religion, which furniſhes ſuch incentives to virtue, and inſpires ſuch exalted hopes. Having nothing to ſubſtitute in the place of Religion, it is abſurd to ſuppoſe that, in oppoſition to the collective voice of every country, age, and time, proclaiming its neceſſity, ſolicitude for the welfare of mankind impels them to deſtroy it.

To very different motives muſt their conduct be imputed. More like conſpirators than philoſophers, in ſpite of the darkneſs with which they endeavour to ſurround themſelves, ſome rays of unwelcome conviction will penetrate, ſome ſecret apprehenſions that all is not right, will make themſelves felt, which they find nothing ſo effectual to quell as an attempt to enliſt freſh diſciples, who, in exchange for new principles, impart confidence, and diminiſh fear. For the ſame reaſon it is ſeldom they attack Chriſtianity by argument : their favourite weapons are ridicule, obſcenity and blaſphemy ; as the moſt

miſerable

miſerable outcaſts of ſociety are, of all men, found moſt to delight in vulgar merriment and ſenſeleſs riot.

JESUS CHRIST ſeems to have *his fan in his hand, and to be thoroughly purging his floor*; and nominal Chriſtians will probably be ſcattered like chaff. But has *real* Chriſtianity any thing to fear? Have not the degenerate manners, and corrupt lives of multitudes in the viſible Church, been, on the contrary, the principal occaſion of ſcandal and offence? Infidelity, without intending it, is gradually removing the reproach: poſſeſſing the property of attracting to itſelf the morbid humours which pervade the Church, until the Chriſtian profeſſion, on the one hand, is reduced to a ſound and healthy ſtate, and Scepticiſm, on the other, exhibits nothing but a maſs of putridity and diſeaſe.

In a view of the final iſſue of the conteſt, we ſhould find little cauſe to lament the aſtoniſhing prevalence of Infidelity, but for a ſolicitude for the riſing generation; to whom its principles are recommended by two motives, with young minds the moſt perſuaſive, the love of independence, and the love of pleaſure. With reſpect to the firſt, we would earneſtly entreat the young to remember, that by the unanimous conſent of all ages, modeſty, docility, and reverence to ſuperior years, and to parents, above all, have been conſidered as their

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appropriate virtues, a guard aſſigned by the immutable laws of God and nature on the inexperience of youth; and with reſpect to the ſecond, that Chriſtianity prohibits no pleaſures that are innocent, lays no reſtraints that are capricious; but that the ſobriety and purity which it enjoins, by ſtrengthening the intellectual powers, and preſerving the faculties of mind and body in undiminiſhed vigour, lay *the ſureſt* foundation of preſent peace and future eminence. At ſuch a ſeaſon as this, it becomes an urgent duty on Parents, Guardians and Tutors, to watch, not only over the morals, but the principles of thoſe committed to their care; to make it appear that a concern for their eternal welfare is their chief concern, and to imbue them early with that knowledge of the evidences of Chriſtianity, and that profound reverence for the Scriptures, that with the bleſſing of God, (which with ſubmiſſion they may then expect) *may keep them from this hour of temptation that has come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.*

To an attentive obſerver of the ſigns of the times, it will appear one of the moſt extraordinary phænomena of this eventful criſis, that amidſt the ravages of Atheiſm and Infidelity, real Religion is evidently on the increaſe. *The Kingdom of God*, we know, *cometh not with obſervation*; but ſtill there are not wanting manifeſt tokens of its approach. The

perſonal appearance of the Son of God was announced by the ſhaking of nations: his ſpiritual Kingdom, in all probability, will be eſtabliſhed in the midſt of ſimilar convulſions and diſorders. The blaſphemous impiety of the enemies of God, as well as the zealous efforts of his ſincere worſhippers, will doubtleſs be overruled to accompliſh the purpoſes of his unerring providence: while, in inflicting the chaſtiſements of offended Deity on corrupt communities and nations, Infidelity marks its progreſs by devaſtation and ruin, by the proſtration of Thrones, and concuſſion of Kingdoms; thus appalling the inhabitants of the world, and compelling them to take refuge in the Church of God, the true ſanctuary; the ſtream of divine knowledge unobſerved is flowing in new channels, winding its courſe among humble vallies, refreſhing thirſty deſerts, and enriching, with far other and higher bleſſings than thoſe of commerce, the moſt diſtant climes and nations, until, agreeably to the prediction of prophecy, the *knowledge of the Lord ſhall fill and cover the whole earth.*

Within the limits of this diſcourſe, it would be impracticable to exhibit the evidences of Chriſtianity, nor is it my deſign; but there is one conſideration reſulting immediately from my text, which is entitled to great weight with all who believe in the one living and true God, as the ſole object of worſhip.

worſhip. The Epheſians, in common with other Gentiles, are deſcribed in the text as being, previous to their converſion, *without God in the world*; that is, without any juſt and ſolid acquaintance with his character, deſtitute of the knowledge of his will, the inſtitutes of his worſhip, and the hopes of his favour; to the truth of which repreſentation whoever poſſeſſes the ſlighteſt acquaintance with pagan antiquity, muſt aſſent; nor is it a fact leſs inconteſtible, that, while human philoſophy was never able to aboliſh idolatry in a ſingle village, the promulgation of the Goſpel overthrew it in a great part (and that the moſt enlightened) of the world. If the unity and perfections of God, together with his moral government and excluſive right to the worſhip of mankind, are truths, they cannot reaſonably be denied to be truths of the firſt importance, and infinitely to outweigh the greateſt diſcoveries in ſcience; becauſe they turn the hopes, fears and intereſts of man into a totally different channel from that in which they muſt otherwiſe flow. Wherever theſe principles are firſt admitted, there a new dominion is erected, and a new ſyſtem of laws eſtabliſhed.

But, ſince all events are under divine direction, is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the great Parent, after ſuffering his creatures to continue for ages ignorant of his true character, ſhould, at length,

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in the courſe of his providence, fix upon falſhood, and that alone, as the effectual method of making himſelf known; and that, what the virtuous exerciſe of reaſon in the beſt and wiſeſt men was never permitted to accompliſh, he ſhould confer on fraud and deluſion the honour of effecting? It ill comports with the majeſty of truth, or the character of God, to believe he has built the nobleſt ſuperſtructure on the weakeſt foundation, or reduced mankind to the miſerable alternative, either of remaining deſtitute of the knowledge of himſelf, or of deriving it from the polluted ſource of impious impoſture. We therefore feel ourſelves juſtified, on this occaſion, in adopting the triumphant boaſt of the great Apoſtle: *Where is the wiſe, where is the ſcribe, where is the diſputer of this world? hath not God made fooliſh the wiſdom of this world? for after that, in the wiſdom of God, the world by wiſdom knew not God, it pleaſed God by the fooliſhneſs of preaching to ſave them that believe.*

FINIS.

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Every other quality ~~besides~~ is subordinate and
erior to wisdom, in the same sense as the m
ho lays the bricks and stones in a building is
the architect who draws the plan and superin
work. The former executes only what the latter c
d directs. Now it is the prerogative of wisdom
reside over every inferior principle, to regulate
rcise of every power, and limit the indulgence
ppetite, as shall best conduce to one great end
e province of wisdom to preside, it sits as umpi
every difficulty, and so gives the final direction
ol to all the powers of our nature. Hence it is
be considered as the top and summit of perfec
belongs to wisdom to determine when to act a
cease; when to reveal and when to conceal a matt
speak and when to keep silent; when to go
her to receive; in short, to regulate the measu
ings, as well as to determine the end, and provi
ans of obtaining the end, pursued in every del
se of actions. Every particular faculty or sk
ds to derive direction from this; they are all
capable of directing themselves. The art of na
instance will teach us to steer a ship across
ean, but it will never teach us on what occasi
proper to take a voyage; the art of war will
us to draw up an army to fight a battle, b

and bring to maturity the precious fruits of the ear
it belongs to another skill to regulate their ansa
by a regard to our health, fortune, and other circum
In short there is no faculty we can exert, no species
skill we can apply; but requires a superintending he
but looks up, as it were, to some higher principle, a
maid to her mistress for direction, and this universa
superintendant is Wisdom

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